

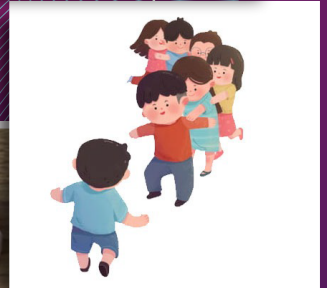
NCBM OUTREACH



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VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT OF NCBM

To ensure that blind people will receive appropriate training and enjoy quality services regardless of where they live in the country.



EDITORIAL BOARD

Wong Yoon Loong

Chin Yew Cheng

Wong Kwee Heong

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author/contributor and do not necessarily represent the views of NCBM.



The National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) provides a vital link between the organisations serving the blind in this country by acting as the national coordinating body.

Through NCBM, the organisations for and of the blind have a channel to discuss and formulate national policies and plans and to pioneer new programmes for the benefit of the blind and visually impaired.

It costs NCBM RM30,000 a year to produce the magazine in print and in braille.

Your financial support will, therefore, go a long way in helping to bring about new developments and progress for the blind. All contributions are deeply appreciated.

Donations should be made in the name of:

**NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND, MALAYSIA
OR MAJLIS KEBANGSAAN BAGI ORANG BUTA, MALAYSIA.**

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** Note: NCBM has not appointed any agent to collect cash on our behalf.
Thank you.*



World Blind Union Announces Newly Elected Table Officers:

The World Blind Union (WBU) is delighted to announce the newly elected Table Officers who will guide our movement through the 2025–2029 term.

This election marks an exciting new chapter in our shared journey, and we extend heartfelt thanks to every candidate who stood for office and to all our members who participated in this important democratic process. Your voices and your votes have shaped the future of our Union.

Meet the 2025-2029 WBU Table Officers:

1. President: Santosh Kumar Rungta (India)
2. First Vice President: Cristina Chamorro (Spain)
3. Second Vice President: Yaw Oyi-Debra: (Ghana)
4. Secretary-General: Moises Bauer Luiz (Brazil)
5. Treasurer: Alejandro Antonio Paz Ambrosio (Guatemala)
6. Immediate Past President: Marine Abel-Williamson (New Zealand)

Mr. Wong Yoon Loong, Executive Director of NCBM is elected as one of the Executive Member to WBU representing Asia-Pacific Region.

Together, this dynamic leadership team represents the diversity, strength and unity of our global movement.

As we look ahead, we are filled with optimism. With this team at the helm, WBU will continue to break barriers, expand opportunities, and ensure that blind and partially sighted persons everywhere can thrive with equity, freedom, and full participation.

Please join us in celebrating this milestone and in offering warm congratulations to our new leaders. We are excited to work alongside them and with all of you – as we carry our mission forward.



The 39th Annual General Meeting of National Council for the Blind, Malaysia:

Speech by Datuk Rosalind Chew Bee Koh, President of NCBM

Date: 8th August 2025

Venue: AC Hotel Kuala Lumpur.

Representatives from the Government Ministries and Departments,
Members, Staff and Observers

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning to all of you. I am deeply honoured this morning to welcome all of you to the 39th Annual General Meeting of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia. Your presence here today is a reflection of your commitment and sincerity to serve Persons who are blind or with visual impairment. Your dedication and kindness will go a long way in realising the full inclusion of Persons who are blind or with visual impairment into the society of Malaysia Madani.

NCBM would like to express its gratitude for the excellent support that has been provided by the Government through its Ministries and Agencies in supporting the inclusion of Persons who are blind or With Visual Impairment through targeted and inclusive approaches. NCBM has been providing inputs on various initiatives by the Government.

In particular,

1. We look forward for the tabling of the Amendments to the Persons With Disabilities Act 2008, the submission of Malaysia's Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities (CRPD) Report and the launching of the National Plan of Action for the PWD's 2026–2030.

2. The formulation of the new National Education Plan and Higher Education Plan 2026-2035 to provide more opportunities for the PWD's.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) courses should also be made accessible to the PWD's, especially for the Persons who are blind or with visual impairment, thereby increasing job opportunities for them.

3. As we continue to advocate for the filling up of the 1% quota for the PWD's in the public sector, we also need to take action in training the blind job-seekers with the soft skills so that they can be gainfully employed. There should also be openings in the private sector for jobs and for entrepreneurship.

4. From the grassroots, I was informed that the health workers are more aware and they are able to assist the Persons who are blind or with visual impairment more effectively. In this connection, NCBM will continue to work with the Ministry of Health in ensuring that health care is truly affordable, accessible and available to the persons who are blind or with visual impairment more effectively.

5. We applaud the Ministry of Transport for facilitating free travel for the PWD's. The Auxiliary Police at the stations are also trained to provide assistance to the blind commuters.

In spite of all this, nonetheless, the blind commuters are still facing difficulties in taking the bus as the buses are not equipped with voice announcements.

NCBM together with its member-organisations continues to organise programmes to enable and empower the blind and visually impaired through Youth Leadership Camps, Massage upgrading training and the Braille Mathematics Workshop.

Regarding the creating of Public Awareness, financial support was provided to St. Nicholas' Home in Penang and the Sabah Society for the Blind to celebrate World Sight Day and White Cane Safety Day at the local level.

NCBM continues to conduct training in disability-related services for the public and the corporate entities.

NCBM also will continue to play an important role on the international scene through our involvement with the World Blind Union (WBU) and the Disabled People International (DPI). This enabled us to advocate directly with UNESCAP and the ASEAN Secretariat to enhance Disability Rights and inclusion.

NCBM also received visits from delegations from the Nhat Hong Centre for the Blind in Vietnam and the China Disabled Peoples Federation (CDPF).

Next year in 2026, NCBM will be celebrating its 40th anniversary. Most importantly, 2026 also marks 100 years of work for the blind in Malaysia which started with the founding of St. Nicholas' Home in Melaka. We need to organise some events to celebrate this significant milestone in the work for the blind and visually impaired.

I have two ideas in mind:

1. To organise a centenary conference to commemorate 100 years of work for the blind and visually impaired and to chart the future direction of work for the blind and visually impaired.
2. Produce a book detailing the journey of 100 years. This project will need the cooperation of member-organisations to open up their archives for researchers to gather information.

I am prepared to chair a working group to work on this. Do share your ideas with Mr. Wong Yoon Loong for further deliberation.

Lastly, let us remind ourselves to continue working together for the good of the people we serve. Let us not compete with each other but complement one another in providing the best services. Duplication of services is a waste of resources.

NCBM is extremely grateful to our generous donors who have supported all our programmes and activities without which NCBM would not have been able to carry out its programmes effectively. It is our duty and responsibility to ensure that we spend within the guidelines stipulated so we will not be penalised by the Inland Revenue Board (LHDN) for non-compliance which has given NCBM tax exemption status. In fact, our tax exemption status will

expire on 31st December 2025. Thus, we have started the process of making application for an extension of our tax exemption status.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all of you for your unceasing support during my tenure as the President from 2021 to 2025. I especially like to put on record our appreciation for the strategic partnership between NCBM and the Government in fostering a more inclusive society. The unwavering support from Member-Organisations, Civil Society Organisations and other Disability Organisations and the Private sector is deeply appreciated.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge the dedication and hard work put in by our Executive Director, Mr. Wong Yoon Loong, and his strong team. On behalf of NCBM, I would like to congratulate Mr. Wong for being reappointed as Member of the National Council for Persons with disabilities for the period July 2025 to June 2027. NCBM is indeed honoured to have been given such confidence by the Government with this appointment. I am confident that he will do his best in amplifying the voices not only of the Persons who are blind or with visual impairment but also of the PWD community.

It has been brought to my attention that Mdm. Jasmine Khoo will not be continuing her service to NCBM. She has served NCBM in her capacity as Vice President in 2011, as President from 2012 to 2019, and as the Hon. Treasurer from 2019 till today.

On behalf of NCBM, I would like to thank Mdm. Jasmine Khoo for her dedication and commitment to ensure the well-being of Persons who are blind or with visual impairment will always be taken care of. I know that she has given more than fifty years of her life to welfare work, including through SBM and NCBM.

I would like to welcome our new member, Mr. Mustaza Mohd. Zin, President of the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM).

May we all be given the strength and the wisdom by the Almighty to continue our service to the Persons who are blind or with visual impairment.

Thank you.

WBUAP Regional Massage Commission Principal Office-Bearers:

According to the Articles and Memorandum of WBUAP Regional Massage Commission, the Chairman, Secretary-General and Treasurer must be re-elected after serving for eight years.

All Board Members unanimously agreed that as from August 2025-2028

Chairman: Mr. Wang Jie

Secretary-General: Mr. Tu Qiang Ge

Treasurer: Mr. Bai Jing Lin

The Chairman then proposed that the next Massage Seminar will be held in China.

The Founding Chairman, Mrs. Grace Y. M. Chan, (JP), then opined that since Indonesia, Laos and Tonga had participated in the Regional Massage Seminar, she suggested that Members of the Board consider inviting them to sit on the Board as members.

All who were present agreed.



The event was held on 26-30th August 2025 in Conrad Hotel, Seoul, Korea
Organiser: World Blind Union Asia-Pacific(WBUAP) Massage Commission.
Host: Korea Blind Union.

Main Theme: Sharing Strategies for the Sustainable Development of Massage by Blind Persons in the Asia-Pacific Region.

National and regional reports from twelve countries were presented –

Namely: Bangladesh, China, Hong Kong-China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, Tonga, Vietnam, and Mongolia.

The sub-themes were:

1. Education and In-Service Training of Blind Masseurs
2. Research in Demonstrating the Effectiveness of Blind Massage.
3. Best Practices in the Management of Blind Massage Centres.
4. Legal and Policy Issues regarding Blind Massage in the Asia-Pacific Region.

There were 349 participants from fourteen (14) countries – Korea 169, China 55, Thailand 48, Japan 20, Vietnam 20, Mongolia 18, Malaysia 3, Hong Kong 3, Bangladesh 3, Indonesia 2, Timor-Leste 2, Laos 2, Tonga 2, Singapore 2.

There was interpretation support – English, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Thai and Mongolian.

The distinguished guests present were;

Park Chan-Dae, Kim Seung-Won and Seo Mi-Hwa – Ministry of Health and Welfare.

En Sung-Ho, President of the Korea Disabled People's Development Institute;

Lee Kyong-Hye, Chairman of the Korea Employment Agency for the Disabled;

Lee Jong-Sung and eight other members of the National Assembly.

The seminar was scheduled for 26th August, 2025 (Tuesday).

On 27th August (Wednesday), there was a welcome performance by the Hyegwang Blind Orchestra.

For the opening ceremony, the keynote speech was presented by Choi Uei-Ho.

The national and regional reports, the sub-theme 1 presentations (with seven speakers) and the Welcome Banquet were held on 28th August (Thursday).

The Malaysia's country report was presented by NCBM Executive Director, Mr. Wong Yoon Loong as Ms. Norimah Ahamad and Dato' Dr Hsiung Kwo Yeun were unable to attend. He was the moderator for subtheme 3 3. Best Practices in the Management of Blind Massage Centres.

The sub-theme 2 presentations (8 speakers) included a demonstration by three assistive technology companies, a Value-Bom Plus Booth promoting simultaneous cinema equipment support project, massage demonstrations by six countries, a Massage Committee Board meeting, a farewell banquet and a city tour.

In appreciation of all the Board Members who served from the year 2021 to August 2025, custom plaques were presented to the following:

Mrs. Grace Y. M. Chan, (JP),

Mr. Wang Yongcheng,

Mr. Yoshiki Takeshita,

Ms. Norimah Ahamad,

Mr. Yu Bin,

Mr. Winit Moonwicha,

Ms. Yuan Hong,

Mr. Mahboob Ahtan,

Mr. Tomohiro Mawa,

Mr. Subin Baekhuntoh,

Ms. Dinh Viet Anh,

Mr. Shih Yang-Chieh,

Mr. Victor Rescober,

Ms. Chen Baohua.

Model Massage demonstration shops were also set up.

There were eight shops altogether – five (5) from China, one (1) from Japan, one (1) from Thailand, and one (1) from Vietnam. All the eight shops were nominated for the Model Blind Massage Demonstration Shop.



By Dato' George Thomas, CEO, Malaysian Association for the Blind

The Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) joins many in mourning on the loss of the Late Dato' Seri Kulasegaran, a true statesman of service whose commitment to the blind and visually impaired community will be remembered for generations to come. His loss is felt not only within MAB, but also across the wider network of advocates, partners and friends who shared in his vision for a more inclusive society.

Dato' Seri Kula was more than a visionary; he was a driving force in shaping the course of MAB's development. His stewardship and dedication strengthened MAB's capacity to serve, ensuring that our programmes went beyond charity to true empowerment. He encouraged initiatives that provided education, vocational training, rehabilitation and livelihood opportunities for Persons who are blind, thereby enabling them to live independently and with dignity.

For me personally, Dato' Seri Kula was both a mentor and guide. His wisdom, patience and foresight helped me grow as a leader, and his words continue to influence my decisions even today. He had the rare ability to combine strategic thinking with compassion, always reminding us that our work was about people first, and structures second.

Dato' Seri Kula was great in championing the prevention of blindness. He understood that while rehabilitation and support for the blind were essential, equal attention also had to be given to preventing avoidable blindness.

Guided by this belief, he was instrumental in fostering collaborations between MAB, the Tun Hussein Onn National Eye Hospital (THONEH) and the Rotary Club. These partnerships brought eye health awareness and screening to the under-served communities by organising medical camps and providing treatment and surgical interventions that saved or restored sight for many. His influence ensured that prevention of blindness became not just a side initiative, but the central pillar of our collective mission.

Furthermore, Dato' Seri Kula was excellent in building bridges through service. His leadership style was defined by collaboration.

He had a gift for bringing together diverse partners, be it the Government agencies, the NGOs, the Professionals or Volunteers, Dato' Seri Kula was able to get them united under a common cause. Through Rotary, he was able to push forward initiatives that raised not only funds but also awareness, thereby mobilising the communities to recognise the importance of vision care. Together with THONEH, he supported the clinical outreach programme that reached out to those who were most in need, those who were far from the urban centres. Together with MAB, he helped to reinforce the belief that true empowerment lies in giving people not only services, but also hope and opportunity.

Indeed, his contribution is a legacy that will live on. The Late Dato' Seri Kulasegaran will forever be remembered as a man of vision, compassion, and action. He taught us that leadership is about service, and that service must be rooted in empathy and justice.

Dato' Seri Kula's advocacy, his drive for blindness prevention, and his unwavering belief in the potential of the blind community will continue to guide us in our work.

On behalf of MAB, THONEH, and our partners in Rotary and beyond, we honour the memory of Dato' Seri Kulasegaran with much gratitude. His life's work has touched countless individuals and has laid a foundation upon which future generations can build.

As we grieve on the loss of Dato' Seri Kulasegaran, at the same time we also celebrate a life of meaning and service. May his soul rest in eternal peace, and may his example continue to inspire us all.



Three Blind Entrepreneurs Get Employment in Pasar Tani:

In May 2025, three blind entrepreneurs started their business ventures in Pasar Tani under the Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA).

Seri Alam Mansor, who is a blind massage therapist, will begin her reflexology service in Pasar Tani which is in Taman Tasik Permaisuri, Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.

The second blind person, Muhammad Nor Amin bin Mohd. Nor Azmi, a reflexologist, will be opening up shop to provide reflexology services in Setiawangsa, Sri Rampai, Kuala Lumpur.

The third blind person, Yaser Arafat Shah bin Abdul Rashid, will be opening up a food and beverage stall in Taman Melawati, Hulu Kelang, Ampang Jaya.

Entrepreneurial Day for the Blind:

For three days, the Entrepreneurial Day for the Blind was held at Kompleks MAB from 30th May to 1st June, 2025. A total number of twenty-four (24) blind and disabled persons took part in the event as entrepreneurs.

Two Government agencies took part by opening two booths for the programme. They were the Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA) and the Universiti Putra Malaysia Agricultural Centre.

Six (6) Government Agencies were also involved in the programme. They were the SME Corp, MARA, Tekun Nasional, Suruhanjaya Syarikat Malaysia (SSM), Bank Muamalat Malaysia Bhd., and Lembaga Hasil Dalam Negeri.

Two side activities were also held for the programme. They were the Children's Colouring Competition and the Karaoke Competition.

MAB received about 500 visitors for the day of the entrepreneurial programme.

Urban Farming for the Blind:

It was 11th June 2025 when four (4) blind persons received cash grants of RM 8,000 each from I-Tekad Ambank and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM). RM6,000 from the grant is for the purchase of equipment and RM2,000 cash from the grant is for them to start the farming programme. The event took place at the Faculty of Business and Economics of Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM) on 11th June 2025. The participants were presented with offer letters from I-Tekad Ambank. The four recipients were the following - Ms Vijayalakshimi a/p Karuppiah, Jason Tang Kah Hung, Muhammad Huzaifah Ahmad, and Ms Norsyaliza Ridzuan. Unfortunately, Vijaya had to leave the programme due to health reasons. UPM is looking for a suitable candidate to replace Vijaya.

The Second Hydroponic Training Programme – 19th June 2025:

Dr. Normala Ismail came to MAB from Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM) for the second round of hydroponic training for the blind at Kompleks MAB on 19th June 2025 (Monday).

Four (4) blind persons attended the programme. They were Dr. Lim Tien Hong, Job Placement Manager as observer, Jason Tang Kah Hung, Ahmad Abdullah, and Ms. Erni Alshukri.

The participants were given the hydroponic set in order for them to practice the planting of *sawi*.

According to Dr. Lim Tien Hong, planting of the *sawi* is very easy and it is very interesting. He would like to encourage other blind persons to join the programme.

The MAB Executive Trainee Scheme:

As reported by Dr. Lim Tien Hong, MAB's Job Placement Manager for the blind, MAB will be resuming the implementation of the Executive Trainee Scheme. Dr. Lim said that blind persons with the first degree, which is the B.A. degree, or the Master's Degree must register with MAB within the first six months of graduation.

The programme includes the first month of orientation through the various programmes of MAB. This will then be followed by five (5) months of practical work in the different programmes of MAB.



By Dr. Wong Huey Siew

Introduction:

As Malaysia embarks upon the formulation of the Rancangan Malaysia Ketigabelas (RMK 13) for the year 2026 to 2030, it is crucial that the Government should integrate the needs and aspirations of the blind and visually impaired community into the national development blueprint.

Aligned with the values of the *Madani* Government in emphasising compassion, inclusivity, sustainability and equity, this call for inclusive policy-making must reflect Malaysia's commitment as a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Ensuring full participation of the blind and visually impaired in all sectors of society is essential in building a community that is progressive and responsive to the needs of all citizens.

The following recommendations are, therefore, the significant areas that require the Government's urgent intervention within RMK 13.

1. Upgrading the NGO-Based Training Centres into Modern and Well Equipped Institutes:

The non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have long played a central role in providing training, rehabilitation and support services to the blind and visually impaired. However, many of these centres have been operating with limited resources and outdated facilities.

Therefore, the Government should partner with the NGOs in order to elevate these centres into professionally managed and technologically equipped training institutes. These upgraded institutions will then be able to follow a national accredited curriculum and be integrated into the broader Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system, thereby enhancing employment opportunities for their qualified trainees.

2. Allocation of Budget for Inclusive Smart Cities with Universal Design:

The Government's Smart City initiatives must prioritise inclusivity by embedding the universal designs into urban planning. This would include the tactile guide paths, audible traffic signals, accessible transportation hubs, digital kiosks with screen-reader compatibility, and inclusive way-finding systems.

These elements are essential to ensure that visually impaired persons can move around in the cities and towns safely and independently.

Budget allocations for inclusive infrastructure must be embedded in all the state-level smart city frameworks in order to close the accessibility gap.

3. Establishing Multi-Disability Support Centres:

In recognising that some visually impaired persons do experience some other forms of disability such as hearing impairment or intellectual disability, there is the urgent need to establish centres that can provide a wide range of services, including sign-language interpretation, psychological support, mobility training and assistive communicational tools. At the same time, Multi-disciplinary teams should be deployed to ensure that comprehensive care and support are made available for multi-disability needs.

4. Setting up of an Assistive Device Bank and Grant Scheme:

In recognising that access to assistive technology is essential for educational advancement, mobility, communication and employment for blind individuals, the Government should create a national assistance device bank, to be managed in collaboration with the NGOs and local authorities.

Through this bank, eligible individuals can take loans to purchase equipment such as E-braille, Braille Edge, electronic magnifiers, braille displays and Screen readers through a subsidised grant or loan mechanism.

This programme would help to enhance digital inclusion, especially for the school leavers, university graduates, the low-income groups and the rural-based communities.

5. Replacing Obsolete Braille Machines with affordable Digital Devices:

The traditional braille machines such as the Perkins Brailler are becoming obsolete and are no longer cost-effective in the digital era. Therefore, to support the learning and communicational needs of visually impaired students, the Government should facilitate the procurement and distribution of electronic braille devices, particularly the E-braille or Braille Edge, Screen readers, laptops and audio-based tablets.

These tools are more versatile, cost effective and aligned with the goals of Malaysia's Digital Education Blueprint.

6. Introducing a Disabled-Friendly Housing Scheme:

In recognising that housing remains as a critical aspect of individual living for Persons With Disabilities, the Government should introduce more dedicated housing schemes for the Disabled, including the blind and visually impaired.

This scheme should offer affordable, safe and accessible housing units with features such as tactile floor indicators, wide doorways, audio-guided intercoms and accessible wash-rooms.

The initiative could be rolled out under the Ministry of Housing and Local Government's development plan in collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare and the State Housing Authorities.

7. Improving Accessibility and Safety in Public Transportation Infrastructure:

The urban rail systems such as the LRT, MRT, Monorail and KTMB stations must be upgraded to meet the accessibility standards required by the blind and visually impaired.

Improvements should include high-contrast tactile pavings, audio

announcements, braille signage, digital maps that are Screen reader compatible, and staff trained on disability etiquette.

Government funding should be allocated under the Transport Ministry in order to conduct accessibility audits and retrofit existing stations.

8. Establishing ICT Technical Support Centres for the Blind and Visually Impaired:

In order to bridge the digital divide, the Government should establish regional ICT technical support centres specifically to meet the needs of Persons with visual impairment. These centres are to provide hands-on support in the use of assistive technology, digital literacy training, and trouble-shooting for screen-reader software, mobile applications and accessible online platforms.

They can also serve as innovation hubs to test new accessible tech products developed locally or internationally.

9. Launching of an Economic Development Foundation for the Blind and Visually Impaired:

A dedicated Economic Development Foundation should be set up under the Prime Minister's Department or Ministry of Economy to support entrepreneurial ventures for the blind.

This foundation should provide seed grants, business development training, micro-credit schemes and market linkage support tailored to meet the special needs of blind entrepreneurs and job-seekers.

Such a foundation will not only empower blind individuals economically but it will also strengthen the ecosystem for inclusive economic growth.

Conclusion:

The *Madani* Government stands at a pivotal juncture to shape an inclusive national development strategy through the RMK.13 that reflects Malaysia's true commitment to disability rights and social justice.

Therefore, by adopting these nine key recommendations, the Government can create a society where blind and visually impaired persons are not just being supported but they are also empowered to contribute actively towards the growth of the nation.

Thus, in doing so, Malaysia will be fulfilling its obligations under the CRPD while advancing towards a more equitable, resilient and inclusive future for all.



By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

(Editor's Note: Ivan Ho Tuck Choy has been blind from early childhood and he received his education at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang followed by rehabilitation and vocational training at the Gurney Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur.

He got employment as telephonist at Kumpulan Guthrie where he worked for thirty years. While working, Ivan was able to further his own education by taking up the correspondence course from Hadley School for the Blind in USA.

Subsequently, Ivan Ho was actively involved in advocating for inclusion in the work for the blind and in setting up of the blind people's self-help organisation, the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM).

He was also actively involved in establishing the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) and formation of the Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled (MCD).

Now Ivan Ho continues with the story of MCD's development, which came about with an unexpected generous offer).

Towards the close of 1997, Mdm. Katherine Chong, who was the incumbent President, floated the idea to the Executive Committee of selling her double-storey shop at 931, Section 17/38 in Petaling Jaya. She suggested that MCD should consider buying it up before she put it up for sale on the open market.

She then surprised everyone with the following proposals:

The asking price would be RM 580,000, below the market price as quoted by a real-estate agent. If the EXCO were agreeable, she would be willing to accept an initial sum of RM200, 000, and the remaining amount of RM 380,000 would be an interest-free loan from her to be repaid by instalments within three years. The loan period could be further extended with negotiations.

Despite these generous terms, the EXCO was still hesitant in committing themselves to such a large outlay of capital. Some of the members feared that if MCD tied itself down with this offer, it would be cash-strapped and it would, therefore, be unable to undertake other projects directly beneficial to the affiliates.

Mr. HRM Storey, as the Hon. Treasurer, reminded the members that there was a Standing Resolution that had been adopted in 1994 to purchase its own building, and that effort had been ongoing in search of a suitable property at a convenient location. Thus, he urged the members not to miss this opportunity but to accept the generous offer. He gave the assurance that he would work out a plan in order to ensure that the activities and the normal operations of MCD would not be disrupted.

Subsequently, the Sale and Purchase Agreement was executed and the agreed first payment of RM 200,000 was made.

Upon taking possession of the building, work was immediately commenced in furnishing and equipping the office with the necessary equipment and facilities to meet the different needs of the disabled groups as well as to plan for the full and proper use of the place. The entire ground floor was designated for administrative and training purposes while the other floor was turned into the living quarters for Mr Mohd. Amin, the full-time clerk, and his family.

Apart from the normal duties as specified in the employment contract for Mohd. Amin, he had to ensure that the place would be properly kept and made available for meetings and training sessions (mostly held after office hours), and to arrange for the refreshments. The affiliates were permitted to reserve the place for holding their own activities at nominal payments in order to cover the utility and other expenses. If an activity were to be extended to other affiliates, no charge would be imposed.

Then several special-interest committees and groups were either formed or they were reactivated in order to speed up the progress of MCD or to benefit the grassroots members of the affiliate organisations.

The Interaction and Leadership Training Committee was reactivated to help organise social and leadership events for members of the affiliate organisations. The Access Monitoring Committee, although formed a few years back and now chaired by Mr. Wong Nam Sang, was able to recruit volunteers and

give briefings to them on the conducting of surveys on the accessibility of public infrastructure such as government offices, shopping malls and transport stations in order to monitor their compliance with the Malaysian Access Codes for follow-up actions. Thus, when they discovered that the Light-Rail Transit stations were not access-friendly to the wheelchair-users, the Committee brought the matter to the attention of the appropriate authorities, and even to the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia, SUHAKAM. They pointed out that access was a universal right for all users.

In fact, much effort was put in by Ms. Bathmavathi to set up the Information Resource Unit on Disability within the MCD office. All the affiliates were urged to contribute materials. Those who were sent to attend international events were required to deposit the conference papers and reports to the Unit.

The working groups were also involved in preparing Country Reports for the representatives to present at international conferences and to put out press releases concerning disability issues highlighted in the newspapers.

They also drafted or updated the Rules and Regulations on travel allowances for officials and participants representing MCD at local and overseas events. They also prepared Position Papers outlining the stand of MCD on important matters. For example, one such Position Paper was on Housing and Hotel Accommodation for the Disabled.

Thus, MCD was now on a firm footing – it had six affiliates representing four different disabilities – the orthopaedically handicapped, the visually impaired, the hearing impaired and the intellectually impaired.

Now MCD had a building of its own which was manned by paid staff. Several of the leaders and some upcoming members had the opportunity to attend national and international conferences in order to gain confidence and experience in running MCD as well as their own organisations.

While there were disappointments and delays in the performance of some committees, generally things were moving along quite satisfactorily; even the financial position had become quite stable. In fact, MCD was able to start repaying its loan to Mdm. Katherine Chong by the end of that year.



By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

I first met Vikneswaran Ganesan on a Saturday evening in March 2024 when we were attending the Agape Christian service in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. I was surprised to learn that he was actually visually impaired and that he was a trainee at the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) where he was taking up the massage course. And so I decided to chat on with him and to get his story.

Vikneswaran was born on 23rd March 1984 in Kuala Lumpur, which means that he is now age forty as a trainee at the GTC. In his childhood days, he was a student at the Bukit Bintang Boys' School and he got a General Certificate for the SPM examination in the year of 2001. And so he decided to go on to the Brickfields MLVK where he was able to take up a technology course on computer software and technological repairs.

With this qualification, he was able to get a job with DHL, where he assisted in the printing of invoices for overseas countries and in the express delivery of documents from the banks.

Later on, he got a Government job as a meter reader. Initially, he worked with *Perbandaran Urus Air Selangor* (PUAS), which was a semi-government company. After working for a year, however, he was transferred to Syabas Sdn. Bhd.

After working with Syabas for about six months, Vikneswaran met with an accident. He was on a motor-bike at the traffic lights waiting for the green light when a bus suddenly banged into him from behind and he flew or went rolling 100 metres away. The helmet vizor broke and it got stuck in one of his eyes and he sustained scratches in the middle of both eyes. Despite having got medical treatment, his eyesight gradually deteriorated but he continued to carry on his job as meter reader.

Before the accident, there was a girl who seemed to show interest in Vikneswaran. She even invited him to visit her in Balai Selayang where she was working as a policewoman. Unfortunately, there was another guy who had been showing interest in this woman too and when he heard about

their meeting, he came to confront them and threatened that he would get Vikneswaran beaten up. And so Vikneswaran decided to leave the scene.

Then it was in 2005, when another girl seemed to show real interest in Vikneswaran. Every morning she would wake him up by giving him a morning call on the phone. He was very touched by this gesture and so he would spend money buying accessories for her. One day he even went to see the Ah Long to borrow RM 1,000. This he did in spite of the objections from his parents.

So he started drinking with friends at night and when he came home, he would get into a quarrel with his parents. His sister, fearful that some mishap might occur, called up the police and they told him to leave the house.

When this girl heard of his plight, she invited him to go to Sungai Patani where she was staying because she wanted to take care of him. Fortunately, he still had his salary of RM2,000 from Syabas and so he was able to clear his records with the Ah Long. Then, before going to Kedah, he asked Syabas for a transfer from KL to Sungai Patani. However, they said that this could not be done unless he could find someone to exchange positions with him. This, not being possible, he resigned from Syabas. And so with RM 800 in his pocket, he went to Kedah.

When he was in Kedah, he went to the accessories shop and bought some ribbons, lipsticks and other ladies' accessories costing about RM300. He presented these gifts to the girl.

Then he needed to work in order to earn some money. So he got a job as security guard in a mall in Sungai Patani. He had to work for twelve to fourteen hours a day and the salary was only RM300 to RM400 per month.

One day they went to the theatre to watch a movie. The movie was about a child missing his mother and it got Vikneswaran into tears. Unfortunately, the girl friend misunderstood Vikneswaran, she took offence and decided to go back home on her own. Later on, she told him to find his own accommodation and she refused to lend him any money to buy food.

Thus, with hardly any money in his pocket, he had to go round begging for food from the food-stalls and he slept for two or three nights at the bus-stop. He went begging for food or for work from the food-stalls and restaurants.

At long last, fortunately, there was a restaurant that agreed to employ him in washing their plates and dishes. He was able to earn RM15 to RM25 per day.

One of the food-stall owners, a Malay guy, heard of his plight and he decided to take Vikneswaran to the bus station to buy a ticket. At the bus counter, they saw a lady with her daughter and they were wanting to sell back one of their tickets at RM 40. However, when they saw that he was visually impaired, they decided to give him the ticket free of charge.

When Vikneswaran arrived in KL about five hours later, he found that his motor-bike was still parked somewhere in the Pudu Bus Station. However, Vikneswaran did not have the key to the motor-bike and he had no tools to unchain the motor-bike. Fortunately, there was the kind coconut seller who called the policeman to come and help.

The policeman brought several tools such as the screw-driver and spanner so that he could open up the chain, switch on the front headlight, open up the clip joining the cable to the battery, and cut the wiring connected to the lamp. Thus, with the wiring system having been disconnected, Vikneswaran had to start the motor-bike manually without the key.

Fortunately, Vikneswaran was then able to find employment as car-washer for RM50 per day. He took on this job for the next few years until 2024 when he was able to be admitted to the Gurney Training Centre at age forty for rehabilitation and vocational training.



By Odelia Cheok

It was a calm and sunny morning. Our little blind boy called Little Bean Bean had just awakened to the sound of birds chirping and singing in the morning air. Little Bean Bean was hungry as he got himself ready for breakfast, just like any other day.

Little Bean Bean then got out of his bedroom and he went straight to the fridge, looking for something to eat. Happily, he suddenly spotted a jar of *kaya*.

“Perfect,” he thought, remembering that his parents had bought fresh white bread on the day before. “This is a classic Malaysian breakfast for me!”

He quickly made a cup of hot Milo and he brought the Milo and the *kaya* to the table. Opening the jar, he spread a thick layer of *kaya* on the bread. Then he put back the jar into the fridge.

“Wow! Let’s eat!” he said to himself happily as he took a big bite.

“Ooh wait, it’s so spicy!” Little Bean Bean said out loud to himself. “Is this a new *kaya*?” he wondered.

Little Bean Bean took another bite. The spiciness grew stronger. Now his mouth was on fire. “This can’t be right!” he said to himself.

Little Bean Bean dashed into the kitchen, grabbed the jar, opened it and took a sniff.

Suddenly, he laughed as he began to realise that what he had taken was not *kaya* at all. It was *Chili Boh* in a jar that looked and felt like almost the same as the *kaya* container!

“What a fiery breakfast surprise!” he thought to himself.

Indeed, our little boy has learnt a great lesson. You should not take for granted that any bottle would contain the food that you want. Also, especially for a blind person, you need to remember exactly where your food has been placed so that you will not mistakenly grab the wrong container.

Furthermore, you should not be in a rush to get your food – take it slow and easy so that you will be able to get to the right place to get the right bottle containing the food that you are looking for.

Most important of all, you should put a braille label on the bottle or container. Or else, you should at least remember the shape of the bottle or container in which the food has been placed. This would be most helpful for a blind person.



VISUALLY IMPAIRED WAGE-EARNER TURNED ENTREPRENEUR

By Loh Kong Ken

(Editor's Note: Loh Kong Ken has been visually impaired from childhood and he was a student at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang. Subsequently after leaving school, he was able to get employment – first as telephone operator in Multi-Purpose Holdings Bhd., then as Administrative Assistant in Geoprima Sdn. Bhd., and finally as Student Affairs Coordinator in Help University.

Currently, Loh has retired from HELP University and he is spending his time doing some voluntary work at MAB and SBM.

In the following, he relates the story of a visually impaired wage-earner turned entrepreneur.)

Cheah Kam Lin was born on August 22, 1975. She has been a visually impaired person since birth due to Congenital Cataract, a hereditary eye disease caused by a defect in one of the genes. Fortunately, she had 10 degree vision in her left eye and 30 degree vision in her right eye. In fact, Kam Lin's own mother together with two younger siblings and another daughter as well as four other relatives also had the same disease. Except for her daughter and her niece who managed to have surgery to correct their eye vision, the rest had to live with the eye condition due to the lack of medical knowledge before the occurrence of knowledge explosion in the 1960s.

Thus, Kam Lin was sent to St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang at the age of ten. At school, she was exposed to all sorts of living skills such as cooking, baking, sewing, washing and ironing of clothes. With the gaining of such exposure, Kam Lin developed an interest in cooking and baking.

And so when Kam Lin started working in early 1984 as a telephone operator, she began buying cook-books for her own collection. Guided by the recipes from these books, Kam Lin began to cook for her house-mates and for herself. During the week-ends, she would try out the cookie recipes and she would let her house-mates try out tasting the cookies. Then

she would adjust the recipes in accordance with the comments given to her by her friends.

Then it was in 1987 when Cheah Kam Lin got married to Loh Kong Ken, who is also blind. However, as both of them were not earning very much from their jobs as telephone operators, Kam Lin would bake cookies during the Chinese New Year in order to present them as gifts for the festival season to her relatives as well as to her bosses.

When the blind friends of Kam Lin got to know about her baked cookies, they began to place orders for the cookies. In this way, the types of choices began to grow each year not only from the blind but also from sighted friends as well.

Then, with the introduction of the social media, Namely Facebook and You-tube, Kam Lin started turning attention to them and she was able to pick up new ideas on how to bake new cookies and various dishes in order to add more choices for her customers.

In this way, Kam Lin learned how to cook *Lo Mai Kai* and to bake muffins, mooncake, chicken pie and pineapple tarts from the You-tube. She would adjust the recipes in order to make them less sweet or she would add other ingredients to enhance their taste.

When Kam Lin's vision became worse due to the pressure of looking at the PC monitor for too long, she opted for early retirement in the year of 2023. She then took up an entrepreneurial course offered by the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB). This was the time when MAB had engaged the lecturers from Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) to teach the theory while the practical aspects would be handled by MARDI. In fact, this course had been tailored to meet the interests of blind and visually impaired persons. Initially, only six visually impaired persons were chosen to pioneer the course and Kam Lin was one of them. Thus, they were told to choose a product that they wished to produce.

And so Kam Lin opted to learn how to produce *asam pedas* paste. The MARDI officers showed her how to go through the process of producing the *asam pedas* from beginning to end. Her product was then sent to the lab for six months of testing and it successfully passed the tests.

Thanks to MAB, the costs for the lab tests, coming to about RM 2,000, were borne by the association. However, if Kam Lin wanted to continue with the testing, especially concerning the shelf-life of the *asam pedas*, then the costs would have to be borne by herself. Because of this, Kam Lin decided not to continue with the testing, reasoning that six months of shelf-life would be long enough.

After the course, Kam Lin got her enterprise registered with the Suruhanjaya Syarikat Malaysia as Heartilyn's Kitchen Sdn. Bhd. However, before she could start producing and selling the *asam pedas* paste, she had to be vaccinated against Typhoid fever and the officers from Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia had to come and inspect our home for cleanliness before Kam Lin could proceed.

And so with all the formalities completed, Now Kam Lin is able to produce cookies for the festive seasons of Chinese New Year and Christmas, and mooncakes for the mid-autumn festival, as well as *asam pedas* paste. Customers would also make orders for muffins, sandwiches, *lo mai kai*, chicken pie and fried *tom yum mee hoon* for various functions. The most popular products from Kam Lin are the pineapple tarts, mooncakes and the *asam pedas*. In fact, customers would even order her pineapple tarts for their relatives and friends staying in Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Qatar, Australia, UK and USA. On one occasion, Kam Lin had a customer who placed an order for twenty bottles of *asam pedas* paste each time an order was made. Kam Lin also has support from MAB – whenever MAB goes for a road-show, they would help to promote the products from Heartilyn's Kitchen Sdn. Bhd.

During the COVID-19 Nation Lockdown in March 2020, a great majority of Malaysians worked from home, and this included Kam Lin. Many of the Malaysians started producing contents on Facebook and on YouTube. Thus, with spare time in hand, Kam Lin also started her YouTube channel called “Heartilyn's Kitchen”. With this channel, she managed to produce about thirty YouTubes on baking and cooking of dishes.

Each time Kam Lin produced a video, her daughter, Jovynn, would help in shooting the video and editing it before having it uploaded on to the YouTube. Unfortunately, due to study-load constraints, Jovynn had to stop assisting her mum, thereby putting a halt to the YouTube project.

Currently, apart from fulfilling the orders from customers, Kam Lin is also cooking for a group of volunteers at a non-profit acupuncture centre in Jalan Ipoh every Tuesday of the week. In addition, she is also assisting her visually impaired friends on request to go shopping or to make hospital visits for medical appointments.



THE WHITE CANE – AN INDISPENSABLE TOOL FOR THE BLIND

By Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong

(Editor's Note: Gordon Tan Tok Shiong has been visually impaired from a young age. He obtained his PhD. in Economics from University of Malaya and he lectured on economics at the university for about twenty years.

After retirement, Gordon loves to spend his time observing how the blind in Brickfields live and work.

In the following, Gordon shows how the white cane is an indispensable tool for the Blind).

I was born in 1958 with an eye condition called Retinitis Pigmentosa, which resulted in me having tunnel vision as well as night blindness from early childhood. Eventually, my eye condition was properly diagnosed by an ophthalmologist when I was already in lower secondary school. Before that, family friends and relatives had been proposing all kinds of reasons as to why I was having poor vision.

Growing up in a new village, I initially went to a normal school just like the other sighted children. However, due to my night blindness, I always had to stay at home after sunset. Then when I was age twenty-one, I went to university to take up a degree course in economics. One day at the university, I paid a visit to my senior course-mate called Terry Ch'ng who was also visually impaired and he stayed about two hundred metres away from my hostel.

When it was about 6 o'clock in the evening, I told Terry Ch'ng that I had to get back to my hostel as I could not see enough to walk at night. However, Terry said that I could stay until late at night and that he would lend me a white cane. He assured me that with the cane, I would be able to get back to my place by myself even when it was night-time. I was quite doubtful actually but I did not object to his suggestion. Then when it was about 9 o'clock in the night, I said goodbye to Terry and I used the white cane which had been lent to me by Terry. To my amazement, I really could get back to my hostel all by myself with the help of the white cane.

From that day onwards, I realised that my self-imposed curfew of twenty-one years at night had suddenly been lifted. Now I could enjoy my new found freedom at night and I started going for night activities every day such as going to the university library or even venturing to Brickfields in order to visit friends. Indeed, the first time I held a white cane for the blind, it really marked a great turning point in my life.

Yes truly, with the white cane, blind people can be seen to be carrying out their daily business normally in the Brickfields area. The blind can be seen walking to the coffee-shops or to the train station or bus-stop in order to board public transport for work.

There are the freelance masseurs who, in spite of their blindness, are able to move from one massage centre to another in response to the bookings from customers. Besides massage, the blind can also be seen going to various places like Bank Simpanan Nasional to withdraw their welfare allowance, going to the post office to pay bills, or to the Speed Mart 99 to buy some sundry goods. Such a high level of mobility would not have been possible or achievable without the use of the white cane.

It is for safety reasons that walking sticks for the blind are usually painted white in colour and they are, therefore, known as white canes. It is because of the importance of the white cane to the blind that many countries, including Malaysia and the United States, have set aside one day in a year as White Cane Day for the purpose of creating public awareness about the blind and visually impaired. And so on that day in particular, the public can witness the unusual sight of a large group of blind persons walking around in the streets of towns and cities like Kuala Lumpur.

In actual fact, there is no magic at all in a white cane. Essentially, it is just a long and straight stick which must be strong and light in weight. For convenience, the blind and visually impaired in Malaysia usually prefer to use the foldable type of white cane. This cane is made up of four quarter-length parts joined together by an elastic cord. When not in use, this cane can be folded up and easily kept inside a bag. By the way, canes of seven folds which can be easily kept inside a ladies' handbag, are also available.

The white canes are available at the various organisations serving the blind in Malaysia and the sticks are generally known by the name of the countries of origin, the common ones being the English cane, Canadian cane, Hong Kong

cane, Indonesian cane, Indian cane and the Taiwan cane. The Hong Kong cane is the most popular because of its durability and lightness in weight. Many of the blind also prefer the Indonesian and Indian canes because they are cheaper and lighter in weight and they are thus easier for the blind to carry about.

In fact, walking sticks or white canes for the blind do come in different lengths and it is, therefore, important for a blind person to choose a stick of suitable length. If the cane is too short, it will hinder a blind person's mobility as he will be unable to detect objects landing in front of his path while he is walking. On the other hand, a cane which is too long may become an obstruction to the public, especially when it is a crowded place. Therefore, the conventional rule is that the length of the cane should be the same as the height of the blind person's armpit.

In fact, many blind persons will get used to a cane of a particular length and he will feel uncomfortable if he is given another cane of a different length. Moreover, a visually impaired person who still has good partial vision may just want to use the white cane as a symbol cane and he, therefore, only requires a short cane. As for a totally blind person who may be new to an area and he wants to carry out some exploration, then he would need to make use of a travelling cane which is made of superlight material and which is longer than the normal white cane.

What will happen to a blind person if his white cane suddenly gets broken in two while walking somewhere outside. Well, it is most likely that he will have to remain standing at the same spot until some kind passer-by comes to his aid. Therefore, in order to avoid getting into such a difficult situation, it is advisable for the blind person to carry an extra white cane in his or her bag for such an emergency purpose as this. Some blind persons even carry some spare parts such as the elastic cord, some tips and a screwdriver so that they can mend the cane on the spot should such a mishap occur. Thus, it is for this reason why many of the blind prefer to use the Hong Kong cane because of its durability in comparison with the Indonesian or Indian cane.

White canes can be bought from the various organisations serving the blind in this country or they can be purchased online.

Truly, I must say that it was that night when I first experienced using a white cane, which I had to borrow from my blind friend, Terry Chng, to return to my hostel, which became the great turning point in my life.



By Wong Kow

I remember when I was in my early twenties how I wished for a young female colleague to say to me, “I love you”. These three words would most probably have melted my lonely heart at that very moment.

However, now I realise that true love can be expressed in so many ways. It does not have to be just empty lip-service. In actual fact, unconditional love comes with care, patience, trust and constancy.

Here are some true short stories to illustrate what I mean.

1. Father Johnny and His New Car:

When the brand new car was parked in the garage, Jason, the six-year old son, happened to be playing with his toys in order to entertain himself.

The new car caught his attention. He picked up a small stone to scratch some words on the new car. With his naive attitude, little Jason thought that his father would be most happy to see the new car with new markings.

Next morning when the father found that his lovely new car had been scratched by the six-year old young Jason, he was most furious. Without giving himself a second thought, he caught hold of Jason and slapped him heavily on the face.

Little Jason could not withstand the heavy pressure of the hitting upon his face. Thus, he immediately fell down, knocking his head upon a sharp object on the floor. Jason became unconscious for three days.

Fortunately, Jason was able to regain consciousness after days of treatment in the hospital. Then when Jason was able to speak again, the first few words that he uttered were, “Papa, I love you”.

Sometime later when Johnny’s father went to the garage to clean the car, he came to realise that little Jason had, in fact, scratched upon his car the words, “Papa I love you”.

This story demonstrates that when a person is angry, he can easily lose his temper and make serious mistakes.

2. Second story – I Shall Wait for You:

Anthony and Amy had been studying in the same university in Kuala Lumpur for a period of four years. Upon graduation, Amy found a suitable job in her hometown in East Malaysia.

At the farewell dinner, Anthony said to Amy, “I shall wait for you”.

Five years later, Amy came back to Kuala Lumpur and joined Anthony to work in the same organisation. Then, after waiting for another two years, they got married subsequently.

Anthony and Amy had a daughter whom they named as Jane. Then, in later years on Jane’s wedding day and she was handed over to the bridegroom, Anthony and Amy said, “Our hearts are always with both of you”.

Indeed, Anthony and Amy had spent their precious time productively and meaningfully. Thus, when they both retired from their full-time jobs, they were able to remain strong and healthy. Moreover, as they were financially sound, they could spend their time travelling to many countries in order to visit their relatives and friends.

Truly, time waits for nobody. Before they realised it, the time and the years had passed by and the couple, Anthony and Amy, had both turned ninety. Then, after suffering from some long illness, Anthony was in a hospital bed and gulping his breath to live on for a few extra minutes.

Amy knew that it was finally the time to part. She said, “We’ll meet again soon”.

Then Anthony passed away peacefully.

This story demonstrates that with mutual understanding, love can be expressed easily, simply and lovingly.



By Moses Choo Siew Cheong

(Editor's Note: Moses Choo has been visually impaired from early childhood and he was a student at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang.

He served as Executive Director of NCBM from 2013 to 2020. It was at this time when he focused his attention on technology developments for the blind.

In the following, Moses shows how blindness does not mean the end of the world.)

While many people tend to be fearful of the word, "blind", being blind does not need to mean the end of the world or the loss of all hope in life. At least, this is the experience of those who have been faced with the prospect of becoming blind. Contrary to what has been defined in most dictionaries, blindness does not really mean living in a world of darkness.

In Malaysia, blindness or visual impairment is defined as a visual field of 6/24, i.e. 20 degrees or less in the best eye. As for the World Health Organisation (WHO), the definition of blindness or visual impairment is a visual field of 6/60 or less in the best eye. Therefore, not all blind persons are totally blind.

While there are many who experience blindness from birth, yet there are many more who become blind later on in life. Then there are some others who will face blindness during their teenage years while some others may become blind due to age-related diseases such as diabetes or macular degeneration when they are in their fifties or sixties.

For those who are born into the world of blindness today, they no longer need to face a bleak and unpromising future. This is because opportunities are available nowadays for the blind to have an education and to undergo vocational training. As for those who encounter blindness later on in life, they too have the opportunity to go through the process of readjustment and rehabilitation which will then enable them to cope with the new challenges of daily life without the use of sight or with the use of limited vision.

Moreover, with the introduction of modern tools, there are many things that can now be accomplished without the use of sight. Such tools include computers, print reading machines and smartphones which are fitted with talking Screen readers, thereby enabling the blind to operate them easily.

Thus, with the help of these modern aids and various software solutions, the blind are now able to function normally in the actual work environment and they can participate more effectively in the decision-making process. Indeed, the possibility of blind persons holding or continuing to hold administrative, executive and professional positions has been greatly enhanced. In fact, ever increasingly, many more of the blind are now able to take part in social networking chats on Facebook, Skype and so on.

If one's hobby is reading, it need not be abandoned just because one has become blind. Nowadays, adjustments can be made in order to enable one to continue with the interest in reading. Books and magazines can be made available in audio format. Alternatively, with the optical character recognition solution, print materials can now be converted into the audio or even the braille format. Indeed, such equipment and solutions are meeting the rapid improvements by the day so that it will not be long before new ideas and solutions will become a reality. This could even be in the form of a pair of spectacles or sunglasses perhaps!

With regards to the requisite skills of daily living and the need to carry out home chores, it is just simply a matter of adapting to a new way of life and doing things differently. Even those people with sight have to depend on the other four senses – hearing, touch, taste and smell – in order to perform certain tasks effectively. For instance, in order for one to know whether the inside of a cake has been cooked or is ready, one would have to use something like a tooth-pick.

If you wish to assist someone who has been affected by the loss of vision, you can get on to our webpage at <http://ncbm.org.my/index/>

Here you will be able to locate the contact of five or more organisations serving the blind in Malaysia.

We do appreciate very much that you want to assist in making Malaysia a home for all, including the blind and visually impaired.



DIFFICULT SON - A BLIND FATHER'S BLESSING IN DISGUISE

By Hng Tek Hing

(Editor's Note: Hng Tek Hing has been totally blind from childhood. He received his education at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang and subsequently underwent rehabilitation and vocational training at the Gurney Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur.

He was thus able to get employment as telephone operator and even to get married. All this has enabled him to live a normal and fulfilling life.

Here is another story of his life).

My son, Kenneth Hng Kah Meng, was born in the year of the rat, which was 1984. Indeed, I had a very tough time as a blind father in raising up this child but I thank God for having given me such a golden opportunity in taking up this great challenge.

Well, after the birth of my son, it was my wife who had to be in two months of confinement to take care of our little baby boy. After the two-month period, we had to send our baby boy to a baby-sitter who was staying in our neighbourhood, the Pekeliling Flats, for a monthly payment of RM200.

A couple of years later when my son was two years plus of age, I decided to send him over to Nibong Tebal to be taken care of by my mother. In those days, my wife and I could do only a few hours of sales in the evening so that we could earn at least a small income. We roamed about to places like Gluttons' Square (or Wai Sek Kai) or to the night spots like the Rasa Sayang Nightclub and the Monte Carlo Bar to hawk our goods.

Fortunately, I was staying in the municipal flats of Bandaraya at the time and so I did not have to pay so much for rental. The sales were very poor and at times I could only pay my mother only RM70. Fortunately, my mother was very good and she accepted whatever I could or could not give her for payment.

When my son was six years of age, I decided to bring him back to our home in Kuala Lumpur. My mother was a little bit sad as my son had been staying with her for a few years already and she was thinking of putting him in a Chinese school in Nibong Tebal. As for me, I preferred to put him in an English school because, from my observations, I noticed that all my brothers who had attended the Chinese school were not able to find good jobs after leaving school. I was, therefore, worried that my son too would have to end up facing such a similar fate.

And so when I had taken my son back to Kuala Lumpur at age six, I put him in an English-speaking kindergarten where he was able to mingle with other children of his own age. Later on, I then got him admitted to the Batu Road School which was in English at the time and he entered standard one.

At this time, however, my son did not appear to be interested in his studies. When the teachers were giving lessons, my son would be sleeping on the floor and he would be giving the teachers a hard time. Even when he was sitting down at his own desk, the teachers observed that he paid very little attention to his lessons.

Each time my son brought back his report card, it would be full of red eggs. And so in order to teach him a lesson, the school authorities decided to put him in the Special Class with all the blind children at the Batu Road School. The objective was to make him realise that even the blind students could study, thereby causing him to feel humiliated. In fact, after spending several years in the Integrated Programme, the resource teachers became aware that now there was some change in our son. And so the authorities decided to put him back into the normal class. From then onwards, our son began to study hard and we told him that he was doing the right thing. I said, “Even the blind children can study. What more for someone like you who has eyesight?”

Thus, when my son came to standard six, he sat for the UPSR examination and he got very good results. The headmaster even shook hands with him and gave him praises. And so he was placed in the Setapak High School where he studied from form one to form five.

One day, during this time, I got a telephone call from one of my former school-mates at St. Nicholas’ School for the Blind in Penang. She was Lotia Limboi and she told me that she would be bringing her niece to the

swimming-pool at St. Nicholas for a swim and she invited us to join her in Penang.

And so one evening, when we were at St. Nicholas, we went to the pool for a swim. Excitedly, my son said that he wanted to swim and he asked me to catch him in the water together with Mimi, Lotia's niece. Thus, we swam up and down in the pool and we really enjoyed ourselves. Then suddenly, I heard my son shouting from the middle of the pool, "Help! Help! Help!"

This got me very worried and I quickly sprang into the middle of the pool to grab him and I dragged him to the side of the pool. It was then that I realised that he was shouting for help because one of his legs had got cramped up so that he was unable to swim. Had I not responded to his call in time, he would have got drowned as that was the deepest part of the pool. From that time onwards, I decided never to go swimming again as the unfortunate incident had given me such a phobia!

Later, I learned from Lotia that by inviting us to join her at St. Nicholas, her real intention was to match-make my son with her niece. Unfortunately, my son was not the type to respond to such gestures at the time as he was more interested in going into business. He was not even interested in going to form six after finishing his form five.

Thus, after the SPM examination, my son asked me to help him get a job while waiting for the exam results. Initially, therefore, I approached one of our neighbours, Robert, for assistance as I knew that his daughter, Susan, was involved in the clothing industry. Fortunately, this was the right time as Susan was in need of a sales promoter.

After a few years, however, my son left the job and he went for telemarketing at the Legend Hotel of Kuala Lumpur. The Manager at the hotel was of Norwegian nationality and she seemed to like my son very much even though he only had SPM qualifications. In fact, she appointed him as the Assistant Manager.

Later, however, when the Norwegian lady left the Legend Hotel, my son also decided to quit his post there. This was because he felt quite unsure of what would be the reaction of the new manager who would be taking over from the Norwegian lady.

My son then joined another company which was the Kangaroo Postal Service. He was given the post of Supervisor to be in charge of the postal services. However, he worked here for only a very brief period of time because the boss did not like him to take long leave and he felt quite unhappy.

Eventually, he joined another company called ATM which was involved in business marketing and he was made to be one of the lead managers. He worked in this company for two years only as he was not satisfied with the salary, which was only RM 1,000.

He then told me that what he really wanted to do was to go into business. He had the Wira car, a second-hand vehicle that I had purchased for him at about RM 22,000. What he would do was to wait for passengers at the PWTC bus station and, in fact, he was actually one of the illegal taxi-drivers there known as *Sapu*. The buses from the East Coast – Terengganu and Kelantan – would stop at this bus station and the *Sapu* drivers would grab the passengers who could be students or even elderly people wanting to go as far as Melaka and Johor.

On one occasion, my son even had a passenger who wanted to go to Johor Bahru. In fact, that was the day when I was feeling a little upset as my son had not returned home in the afternoon. I telephoned him to enquire where he was and he said that he had a passenger going to Johor Bahru. I was really amazed when he confirmed that he was taking a passenger to Johor Bahru. On the way back, he would stop at Air Keroh in Melaka to pick up other passengers who wanted to come back to Kuala Lumpur.

One incident that my son narrated to me I will never forget. There was a passenger wanting to go to Banting and my son offered to take him there. However, my son did not really know the way and the passenger that my son was just going round and round as he was not going in the right direction. However, my son kept assuring the passenger that they will get there soon. Finally, the passenger told my son, “This is not the road that I want to go!”

So the passenger got out of the car somewhere along the way and he hailed for another taxi to take him to Banting. My son narrated this incident to me and I have never forgotten it until this day.

Eventually, my son gave up driving the *Sapu* taxi and he decided to go into more high-tech business. Eventually, on my advice, he took up tourism. He started off by doing the city tours mostly for passengers coming from

Capetown in South Africa. Subsequently, he found this to be a very tiring job, especially when he had to wait for the passengers for a whole day as they spent their time relaxing in the restaurant known as The Ship in Bukit Bintang. He did not relish the idea of having to spend so much time just simply waiting around for the passengers.

And so finally, he decided to take up the ticketing business at the KLIA. He sought my assistance and I had to find somebody who could help him. Fortunately, I came into contact with the Sedunia Travel Agency and they agreed to supply him with the air-tickets while I came up with the initial capital.

My son started off and he found the business to be very lucrative. There were especially many of the Arabs coming from the Middle East because, at this time, Australia and Indonesia had not yet opened up to the Arabs to enter their countries and so my son was able to deal with lots of people coming from the Middle East. Each time they came to Malaysia, they would be buying lots of goodies like chocolates and perfumes and the hotels would be full. Moreover, these Arabs would be loaded with brief-cases full of US currency because in those days people had not yet started using the credit-card.

Undoubtedly, my son is only an SPM holder but I can say that he has truly turned out to be a very successful man. Just think, at such a young age of thirty-five, my son has managed to establish a company called Honey-Stream Marketing. His company is involved in the sale of air-tickets as well as the handling of hand-carried luggages in the airport. In addition, he has also managed to get a house of his own so early in his life and today this house is worth about RM 280,000.

Indeed, it was a great challenge for me in bringing up my son as I had to overcome so many difficulties. But I must say that all my efforts have paid off and I truly thank God for having given me, a blind father, the abilities and the means to bring up my son successfully.

Truly, my son, Kenneth Hng Kah Meng, has certainly been for me a blessing in disguise! Thank you, Lord!

THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCES AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT CAN COME FROM BEING BLIND



By Teow Cheng Poo

(Editor's Note: Teow Cheng Poo has been visually impaired from childhood and she was a student at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang.)

My life was simple but beautiful. Each morning I awoke with eagerness to the splendid daylight wherein I enjoyed all sorts of outdoor activities in my amazing surroundings.

There was a wide river with clear flowing water that wove through my peaceful town like glossy ribbons. I took part in many expeditions and I galloped across green fields, leapt over large ditches, chased and caught dragonflies, fireflies, spiders and grasshoppers. Indeed, life was most wonderful for me growing up in this small town. Nature was truly beautiful.

Half way through my elementary years, however, this magnificent environment which had given me so much joy suddenly disappeared from me and it was replaced by darkness. I had a high fever caused by Meningitis which robbed me of my vision. My dear mother was ill prepared in caring for a disabled child – who would have expected such a misfortune to come along in a family? She did what she could for me and she was most concerned for my safety. She insisted that I should stay where I was put as I could no longer see my way around.

Fortunately, I recovered and, being youthful and full of vigor, I naturally wanted to continue living an active life. Thus, as soon as I had recovered my health, I was up and about, going in and out of the house and ignoring my mother's well intended restrictions. In actual fact, I was too young at the time to fully understand my mother's inhibitions, and so I ran, I played and I skipped along with other children, leaping over ditches and climbing up trees as we played hide-and-seek.

Well, my small-town care-free life came to an end when I was enrolled into St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang. Little did I imagine then that this institution would give me a much brighter future than what I would have

had if I were sighted. Initially, I felt lost and miserable staying in a residential school so far away from home. The strict rules and regulations did not make life easier for me.

The blind children here were trained from a young age with Daily Living Skills such as cooking, washing and ironing of our own linens, cleaning our wardrobes and sewing buttons. We had a weekly project to stitch hexagonal pieces of patchwork together to make blankets for use in the sick-bay.

We were also not excluded from sports and recreational activities and we were taught swimming and diving, cycling, walking on stilts, rope-skipping and so on. We were taken for outings to the parks where we would climb up to the tree-top houses. The interest in outdoor activities has remained with me since, and in recent years, I have cycled around Penang island on a tandem with a sighted pilot, and I have even climbed up the entire 2,733 feet of Penang Hill.

I am really grateful to have had such a wholesome and active childhood despite my disability. St. Nicholas has certainly brought light to my world of darkness through education. I am able to read books and stories in different languages in the form of dots known as braille. I can solve mathematical problems through touch by looking at tactile diagrams and I am able to locate places in the world by using tactile maps and graphics.

Indeed, education has brought me tremendous joy and success as I diligently strove to obtain good grades in my school performance. Even when I lacked sufficient academic materials, my passion for learning drove me to make significant achievements for which I was frequently awarded.

My academic success helped me to earn a scholarship for tertiary education in a prestigious university. This was very momentous for me, being one of the few coming from a small town and being the first in my family to have had such an opportunity. When I was presented the scroll for my Honours degree at the convocational ceremony, many people were proud of my success and they gave me two rounds of applause.

I started my career as a Social Worker which gave me the golden opportunity to serve those who were less fortunate than me. I had countless positive experiences while serving the poor, needy and disabled. I travelled from village to village with a physically handicapped officer. Together we reached out to visually impaired people who were house-bound and we helped them

to get reconnected with society. We set up a community centre where they could learn social skills as well as other useful skills in order to improve their quality of life and to help increase their chances of employment.

In addition, I organised tuition classes and I taught English and Bahasa Melayu to sighted students and adults. I also offered free tuition to those who were poor. In the process, I discovered my talent of teaching and so I moved on to become a teacher.

Then I realised that the students who were blind would require more attention and meticulous teaching and thus I turned my focus to the education of the blind. Consequently, I have helped in bringing education to many generations of bright young girls who are visually impaired. Subsequently, bearing in mind that my students will walk down the same beaten path that I have trodden, I continually tried to improve my teaching and ICT skills in order to arm the blind students with the necessary knowledge and skills to face the challenges of living in a world without sight among the people with sight.

With each fall or failure that I encountered, I gained a better grip of the situation, thereby enabling me to overcome my disability. Consequently, I have become very positive towards life which I have found to be full of opportunities, and more so with the support and encouragement from the community around me.



In June 2019, the Blind Travellers' Network was launched by Stacy Cervenka. This is an online platform which connects blind and visually impaired persons with information and resources for access of the blind in countries around the world. The platform hosts blog posts, reviews, discussion boards, and event listings in order to help users expand their horizons, leave their comfort zones, and explore new places.

This webpage is dedicated to global travel opportunities for the blind, thereby enabling blind people all over the world to explore independently.

Cervenka, who is blind, came up with the idea of the platform after she and her husband Greg, also blind, sought to enjoy a leisurely horse-riding lesson at a ranch, but they encountered obstacles and disrespect.

Cervenka wanted to make a posting about her experience. However, she realised that this would take a long time to reach out to other blind people. So instead, she came up with a centralised place where she could post a review of that stable to keep other blind people informed.

Thus, with the creation of this Blind Travellers' Network, she can provide information about travelling with a white cane in China, paragliding in Torrey Pines, and beach-going in Sydney, Australia.

To visit the Blind Travellers' Network, go to blindtravellersnetwork.org



Datuk Dr. Shad Faruqi reflecting on Tunku Abdul Rahman:

Everyone of us must respect each other's right and feelings, be tolerant of each other's religion, customs and habits. For in diversity can we find real unity.

Unity requires the sharing of commonalities and the respectful acceptance of differences.

Anwar Ibrahim:

It is important to balance modern advancements with cultural and historical identity. It is akin to reaching for the sky while staying grounded in our roots.

This balance is especially critical in the post-colonial era, which demands embracing change.

Andrea Bocelli:

Losing my sight had nothing to do with my focus on music. My passion for music was already there; so it would be unsuitable to give too much significance to my blindness.

William Shakespeare:

Fishes live in the sea, as men do on land. The great ones eat up the little ones.

Prof. Jacob Neusner – on the purpose of Education:

Much that you learn today will not be true five years from now. Many things you have not heard of today will be important five or ten years ahead.

If I teach you something supposedly “relevant”, I am guaranteeing irrelevance.

If I teach you how to work, to have good attitudes, to take responsibility for your own ideas, to communicate a problem through no matter what subject matter is used to get those basic skills of mind and intellect across, then I am giving you something you can use for a very long time to come.

Those skills will never change. Therefore, the stakes are for a lifetime.



Confucius:

Life is really simple. But we insist on making it complicated.

Franz Kafka:

Start with what is right rather with what is acceptable.

Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe:

I don't want to be interesting. I want to be good.

Dwight D. Eisenhower:

Peace and justice are two sides of the same coin.

Meister Eckhart:

Do exactly what you would do if you feel most secure.

George Bernard Shaw:

Life isn't about finding yourself; life is about creating yourself.

Albert Einstein:

Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile.

Pearl S. Buck:

One faces the future with one's past.

Bono:

The worst disease in the world today is corruption. And there is a cure – transparency.

Anonymous:

To err is human; to give is divine.

Michael Mullen:

The single biggest existential threat that is out there, I think, is cyber.

Aristotle:

Our happiness depends on us.

Biden:

You can't love your country only when you win.

You can't love your neighbour only when you agree.



Readers are invited to write for our publication, NCBM Outreach. For articles published, payments are as follows:

1. Original articles on the achievements of blind people or of an inspirational nature – (about 500 words) – RM80
2. Articles containing ideas and suggestions for the improvement of NCBM or its member-organisations (about 500 words) – RM80
3. Articles on funny or unusual experiences (250/500 words) RM40/RM80. Poems which are personal compositions depicting experiences of a blind person (50/100 words) – RM 40/RM 80
4. Articles of an informative nature written in your own words – (About 500 words) – RM80
5. Poems which are personal compositions depicting experiences of a blind person (About 50/100 words) – RM 40/RM 80
6. Interesting tidbits jokes or other information taken from magazines or other sources of limited circulation – RM15

Note: For all articles, other news and reports, submitted by anyone, including officials in the organisations serving the blind, payment will be made.



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